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Visit Perth, Fremantle and Rottnest Island in Western Australia

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Rottnest Island walking trails bringing you to the sea. Picture: Kari Gislason.

Source: Supplied

IN all probability, the water at Cottesloe Beach is no bluer than at all the other beaches of Australia. But early afternoon on the day I arrive, that blue seems total, or perhaps even on the edge of some other colour spectrum still being invented. The blue of the west.

There are high pines along a strip of park, a bathing pavilion from a different era, and a groyne of large boulders on to which a group of kids clamber. When they reach the end, the kids spread out, creating an uneven silhouette of explorers – something like one of those drawings of Christopher Robin being followed by his animal friends.

It's hard to tell what game they're playing, but perhaps you don't need a set game. What matters is that feeling of walking the edge of the world.

There's not much between these rocks and Africa. Why wouldn't you venture out on to the last ones?



Kids clamber on the rocks at Perth's Cottesloe Beach. Picture: Kari Gislason.

Source: Supplied

Meanwhile, in Perth's city centre, the water is being brought in. I'm sure I'm not the only visitor who's wondered why the city buildings sit so far back from the Swan River. The distance gives the skyscrapers added drama and staging, but robs the downtown area of a connection to water that seems wholly West Australian.

The city's answer is well under way: the Elizabeth Quay development will create a 2.7ha inlet that effectively joins the city to the river. It will mean that going to the CBD will feel like going down to the water. And it will add to a process of urban renewal that already sees many of the town's older building being reclaimed and repurposed.

My guide to these changes is a returned local, Ryan Zaknich, who now runs walking tours through inner-city streets that he remembers as once being rather quiet, and all but empty on weekends. That's also the city of my own last visit some 10 years before. But Perth today is different; I notice street art, stylish bars and restaurants, but perhaps most of all a lighter, more upbeat atmosphere.



Restaurant and bar Lot 20 in Northbridge. Picture: Kari Gislason.
Source: Supplied

Crossing the footbridge at Central Station brings you out at the Cultural Centre and then Northbridge, an area that, like many of the grungier parts of our cities, has been adopted by hipsters, boutique shops, and cafes. We call in to the bar Lot 20, and admire its reclaimed furniture and a charming second-hand feel that has drawn in an afternoon crowd.

And then we wind our way back towards the train station, and to Kakulas Brothers, a grocer and popular pit stop for those on their way to a picnic at the nearby Kings Park.

My dinner that night is at the Fraser Suites' restaurant, Heirloom, which with the guidance of celebrity chef Pete Evans, is also very much part of current food movements. The emphasis here is on healthy eating, which in a hotel means offering something other than the over-rich diet that can be a hazard if you travel often.

Health food movements are always in danger of being too good for you to be much good, but I thoroughly enjoy my meal, and make all the customary avowals of diversifying my own cooking when I get home.

The next morning, I make my way to Fremantle for a ferry to Rottnest Island. On the way to the ferry stop, my driver tells me that everyone in Perth has their own Rottnest story.

His records the time that he somewhat naively volunteered as a parent on a week-long school camp. The group spent the first day cycling, and by its close he wondered how he was going to survive the week.



The Perth skyline from Kings Park. Picture: Kari Gislason.
Source: Supplied

He did much more than survive; in fact, that week had become one that is very fondly remembered. Were he to return, he'd find much unchanged.

You still need to ride bikes everywhere, for cars aren't allowed. And the feel is of a coastal village to which people return year after year.

But a golf course that had become an overgrown shortcut has recently been renovated and reopened. And on the lanes that encircle the island, a few Segways have joined the light traffic of the bikes.

It was my first time on one of these. To begin with, they're a little counterintuitive, as when you first lean forward in ski boots. But after half an hour, I am capable of touring the island's World War II battlements high on the sand dunes.

From these vantage points, you feel again the sensation of being on Australia's edge, in a way a vulnerable spot and of course one that had to be more self-sufficient than more crowded and developed regions.



Kakulas Brothers in Northbridge. Picture: Kari Gislason.
Source: Supplied

You often hear that isolation creates resilience, but just as often it creates the feeling of having to get away – to the east coast, to Europe, or just towards the sense of being part of the world.

If things are changing and the world at large is now firmly part of the west coast, then I think visitors will, all the same, notice how the west coast still belongs to the sea and that endless view out to the ocean.

That afternoon, my guides show me an extensive network of walking trails that are being developed across the island, and that end in boardwalks and steps down to the sea.

At one of the beaches, we see a large group of seals. Some are swimming with their flippers in the air, to regulate their temperature. But others seem satisfied with lying on the rocks, and watching the water break against the shore.

The writer was a guest of Tourism Western Australia.



Western Australian beaches are great fun. Picture: Supplied
Source: News Corp Australia

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Getting There

Qantas flies to Perth in Western Australia.

pH 13 13 13 or see [qantas.com.au](http://www.qantas.com.au) (<http://www.qantas.com.au>)

For a touch of luxury and added comfort getting around town, try **Limousines Australia** (<http://www.limoaustralia.com.au>) .

A regular ferry service to Rottnest Island is operated from Fremantle by **Rottnest Express** (<http://www.rottnestexpress.com.au>) .

Staying There

In Perth, try the spacious and beautifully appointed **Fraser Suites** (<http://www.perth.frasershospitality.com>) .

High-end design qualities at Fremantle's **Hougoumont Hotel** (<http://www.hougoumonthotel.com.au>) I quote the area's fascinating maritime past.

Doing there

For walking tours of Perth, check out **Two Feet & A Heartbeat** (<http://www.twofeet.com.au>) .

The Rottnest walk trails (<http://www.rottnestisland.com/about/rotnest-wadjemup-walk-trail>) offer a wonderful way to explore the island.

Rottnest Segway Tours (<http://www.segwaytours.com.au/tour-information/rotnest-island/>) are great fun and very informative.

In Fremantle, be sure to check out the popular and beautifully presented restaurant **Bread in Common** (<http://www.breadincommon.com.au>) .

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